When *Nights Of Cabiria* was released, *The New York Times* gave it a lukewarm review, likening Giulletta Masina to a female Charlie Chaplin, calling her character "elusive and insufficient," but giving her the praise of being "well supported" by her male costars. More than anything, the review seems to reflect the expectations of American move viewers, from the way a movie is filmed, to the way it is cast, to the story it has to tell.

The only comment *The New York Times* reviewer Bosley Crowther had made about the visual aspect of *Nights Of Cabiria* is that "the production, filmed in black-and-white, is vivid, and the English subtitles for the Italian dialogue are clear." In the decade of such American releases as *Ben-Hur* and *Around The World In 80 Days*, this sort of an insufficient appreciation for the starkness and composition of *Nights Of Cabiria* is not all together surprising. American films of the time period could boast of elaborate locations, vivid color, and stunning visuals where the camera choices can tell a story of their own. For example, in *The Searchers*, a lot of emphasis is places on the landscape, framing of the characters against the landscape to invoke a certain feeling, and the juxtapositions of opposites such as day and night, deserts and rivers, and traveling through seasons. In other words, there is a distinct visual style preference in American movies. On the other hand, *Around The World In 80 Days*, which won no less than five Academy Awards, relied manly on the extravagant scenes and epic grandeur, having no other good qualities to boast of. However, what these two films have in common is the use of color, landscape, and overwhelming visual opulence. *Nights Of Cabiria* seems almost a polar opposite, although I believe the phrase 'comparing apples to oranges'

would be more fitting. In a style of Italian Neorealism, the film is black and white, relying on natural settings. The camera choices do tell a certain story but it is rarely contrived. For example, it is impossible to tell if the first scene, showing the city in the background, is meant to depict the ugliness and starkness of rebuilding of all that was destroyed in the war, or if the scenery was simply inevitable. In one of the last scenes, Cabiria and Oscar are on a cliff, watching the sunset. It a beautiful shot and the light is almost ethereal, but there is an underlying current of tension and menace; it's hard to determine whether this is due to the camera choices or the fact that we know something unpleasant is about to happen. The setting of Cabiria's house against a stark and desolate background is intentional, but is it telling us a story of her loneliness or is it simply a depiction of post-war outer city limits? Oftentimes, the camera choices such as the close up of Cabiria's face in the last scene are clear and blunt in their intentions, with no ulterior motive, but the story itself is such that no cinematic tricks are needed.

The sound in 1950's American movies is often used to tell a story of its own or to reinforce the certain aspects of the plot. For example, in *The Searchers* the music is a unifying thread in the film, consisting of a theme and the variations on the theme. The use of silences is specific, such as Laurie reading the letter and music starting only when Scar is mentioned, or when Brad is killed and the music starting the moment he dies, in essence showing us which shot killed him. *Nights Of Cabiria* features a lot of background sounds such as the train passing by, which interrupt the dialogue and result in a type of sound chaos. The music, when present, is not a backdrop or a cinematic technique, but

simply the part of the plot. While it does show a certain aspect of Cabiria's personality, it does not seem to have any other purpose.

The American movies of the 1950's seem to be predominantly family themed, with the nuclear family as an ideal family. There is a happy ending, a resolution, in which more often than not, the role of a woman is to be the wife, the mother, or a long sought and finally obtained love interest for the leading man. This particular decade in American film shows less woman characters than the previous decades, with women cast in stereotypical roles, either domesticated, wishing to be domesticated, or sexualized. The Hayes Code might have loosened somewhat during this decade, but this did not seem to affect the way a woman's role was perceived. Even the strong independent female characters are often hiding a yearning to be married, or their accomplishments are only possible because of assistance provided by men. Cabiria is also yearning to be married, but her character is anything but stereotypical. She is fiercely independent, abrasive, loud, and prone to emotional outbursts. Her joy is infectious and her anger unpleasant. When her ego is wounded, she responds with fury, but the disappointments she faces are met with a stubborn insistence to carry on. *Nights Of Cabiria* explores the role of an outsider, but unlike Ethan's character in The Searchers, who is an outsider from the stereotypical family life, Cabiria is an outsider among the outsiders. Her clothes, the tight, high-waisted skirt and ragged fur coat are the illustrations of her profession. On the other hand, the saddle shoes and the umbrella she carries, show her character. She is a practical person, aware that she might have to run and that her profession leaves her vulnerable to elements. Often, the way she carries the umbrella makes it look more like a weapon than

an accessory, and it gives the idea that it might have been used as such in the past. Her living situation separates her from other prostitutes with the exception of her friend Wanda. Although owning a home means she is reasonably well off, it serves to alienate her from the others. She is singularly unique in every way, from the childlike delight at being served lobster, to the despair of having asked for a miracle only to find that nothing has changed, to the very end of the film, where any lesser person might have been defeated by the circumstances, while she remains hopeful and determined to continue on. She is not pretty in any conventional meaning of the; there is severity in the shape of her eyebrows, in the way her hair is pulled back tightly, and none of these features are softened until she meets Oscar and falls in love. She is continuously mistreated by men, but her story is not so much a social criticism, but more of a "mental condition of humanity through the struggles of women."

Although the Hayes Code was on its way out in the 1950's, the subject matter of an aging prostitute who under her harsh and abrasive exterior still hopes for a better life, is not exactly the type of subject matter common to American film. As a matter of fact, Fellini himself had received some criticism for the subject matter. There is an often circulated story of a certain producer making this comment: "First you make a movie about homosexuals, now prostitutes, what's next?" To which Fellini was said to respond: "A movie about producers." Hollywood in the 1950's had a tendency to brush over social issues, either minimizing them, or resolving them in an unrealistic and idealistic fashion. Again, the female characters would only find themselves fulfilled and happy if they served some role in the family or conformed to the traditional role. Cabiria's happiness

and fulfillment comes from within, regardless of the difficulties she has been through or the life she leads. While American movies depended on the happy ending, Cabiria's ending, although uplifting, could hardly be called happy. Fellini himself had stated that out of all his characters, he worried the most about Cabiria, wondering had become of her after the last scene of the film. It is also worth mentioning that the ending, where Cabiria is walking down the street surrounded by musicians and nodding silently at the camera, reassuring us that she will be all right, is not typical of a neorealist films. Instead of delivering a specific message, the film is more focused on simply telling the story. Fellini himself has said: "I never make moral judgments. I'm not qualified to do so. I am not a censor, a priest or a politician." There is no right answers, no good or evil, and the characters are not defined by their circumstances.

In conclusion, Felini is opposed to offering a solution. Therefore, the only similarity that can be said of *Nights Of Cabiria* and the American films of the 1950's is that Cabiria, like most women, yearns for commitment. The difference is that she does so "in a society that breeds a seemingly unshakable restlessness among men, who are rarely content with their relationships, or are blinded by their pursuit of wealth."